

Serra Club, Prairie Lakes County, 1994

The Mystery of Late Vocations

I. Thank Fr. Brennan for inviting me to reflect with you on the mystery of late vocations

A. Fr. Brennan asked that this talk reflect on the vocation to religious life and the priesthood "late in life."

B. I thought I would situate this reflection on the following way:

1. Vocation in general
2. Some examples of vocations "late in life" with the gifts and problems they involve
3. End with a few autobiographical remarks
4. Open to discussion

II. Vocations in General

A. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Hominis* (His Encyclical-The Redeemer of Man) says that --every person in the Church has a vocation (not just nuns or priests)

1. Reflecting on Vatican II he said: "For the whole of the community of the People of God and for each member of it what is in question is not just a specific "social membership"; rather, for each and every one what is essential is a particular "vocation." (#21)

2. He reflects further on the meaning of "initiative", first of all of God calling each Baptised Christian to a vocation to serve the people of God in a particular way, and secondly of Vatican II or Synods which help clarify through further initiatives, that every Christian has a vocation: "We must...always keep in mind the truth that every initiative serves true renewal in the Church and helps to bring the authentic light that is Christ insofar as the initiative is based on adequate awareness of the individual Christian's vocation and of responsibility for this singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by which each Christian in the community of the People of God builds up the Body of Christ." (#21)

3. The Lord God calls whomever He wills whenever He wills- He searches for a response of faith. Only someone with faith can recognize the call... and say "Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will." Jesus asks us the Question: "When the Lord God comes again, will he find faith anywhere?" So we have to ask ourselves always, "How am I responding to the call of God first to find my true vocation of service in the Church, and second, to work

with grace to perfect the living out of this vocation to the best of my ability.

II. Examples of vocations late in life

A. **Genesis:** We are told that Abraham was called by God to "leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you" at the age of 75, and that he gave birth to Issac at the age of 100.

1. Fear that he was too old
2. Sarah laughed
3. But they were faithful to the call to conceive- and later to sacrifice "Abraham, Abraham..." God called "Here I am, he replied.

B. **Exodus:** We are told that Moses was called by God as a mature, married man: "Moses, Moses," he said. "Here I am," he answered. And God asked him to lead his people out of Egypt

1. Moses was afraid: He asked God what if the people will not believe him?
2. Moses was afraid: he said: "But I am a slow speaker and not able to speak well."
3. But he overcame his fears and responded to the call.

C. More recent examples:

1. Widows who founded religious communities for women:
 - a. Blessed Marie of the Incarnation (Ursuline- Quebec City- 1700's)
 - b. St. Marguerite D'Youville (Grey Nuns- Montreal- 1800's)
 - c. St. Elizabeth Seton (^{Daughters} ~~Sisters~~ of Charity)- USA

2. Those who had what appeared to be one vocation, and then called to another one

- a. Mother Teresa: already in final vows in one religious community- a teaching order in India- and received a call on a train to found another community to work with the poorest of the poor
- b. Lately seen men called into Holy Orders of the Roman Catholic Priesthood after marriage, or even after being a minister in a Protestant Denomination
- c. Similarly for religious life, women who have been married, (widowed or whose marriage was never sacramentally valid) even may have children or who have lived in the world for many years before answering a call to become a "spouse of Jesus Christ" though practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience
- d. challenges: less flexibility, greater attachments, poorer ability to memorize and learn new things, difficulty in practice of poverty and obedience

- e. gifts: confidence in the call, knowledge of the world, ability to get to the heart of things

faster, maturity

D. What does it mean to say that a person has a "late vocation". Is any vocation "late"?

1. The *Catechism* reflects on the meaning of "this day" in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread:" It has some application to our reflections. "...this "today" is not only that of our mortal time, but also the "today" of God." (#2836)

2. God lives in the eternal present, we live in time. It is the intersection of these two that occurs daily. God's time is not limited by our time.

3. So late is a relative judgment, by our standards. For God, if a person answers "Here I am" whenever and however he calls, it is on time, in the fullness of time.

III. Autobiographical remarks

A. I entered religious life at the age of 43. I often thought of our foundress Mother Catherine McAuley, who was a single woman who was asked by her Bishop to found a religious community in Dublin at the age of 52. She entered the novitiate of another community (the Presentation Sisters) at that age. It was very difficult for her, but she persevered and made her foundation of the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

B. The particular community Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma which I entered was renewed after Vatican II and received its Pontifical Status in 1973.

C. In the mystery of how God prepares people for their vocations, in 1972 when I was a Professor of Philosophy at Concordia in Montreal two sisters who were part of the renewal of the community I later joined took a two day pilgrimage to St. Joseph's Shrine in Montreal.

D. A few years later, in 1976 I made a pilgrimage there myself to place the question of my vocation in St. Joseph's hands: I wrote- If I am to marry, please help me to choose the right man, and if I am to enter a religious community, please help me to choose the right community.

E. Of course, later I became more aware that vocation always involves three choices, not just one: First is the choice and call of God, second is my own response, and third is the confirmation by a legitimately constituted community in the church. For sacramental marriage there is also the choice of the partner, for sacramental priesthood the choice of the Bishop or Superior General, if a religious priest.

F. Well, the Superior General of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, without knowing that I had made that prayer to St. Joseph asked me to enter Postulancy on May 1, the Feast of St. Joseph, and one of the Sisters who had visited the Shrine in

1984

Montreal so many years before is now the Superior of our Community there, and a professor of Nursing at McGill University, and tonight when I am asked to speak about late vocations it is the Feast of St. Joseph in the Church.

G. All of these gentle gifts of God must, of course be weighed carefully by reason and testing of vocation through all the usual means, but they dispose us to see the loving hand of God guiding us along the way.

H. Our specific vocation, when realized, becomes a source of great joy through its call to serve in a particular way the people of God who are all called into union with their Lord and God. "Here I am Lord ready to do your will!"

I. We need to support one another in the variety and unity of the different vocations in the Church, to love our own vocation and to love the complement vocations of others in the Church with a love analogous to that shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who, as a Communion of Love of the Three Divine Person in the Trinity, offers us the supreme example of self-gift to one another. We need to try here on earth to love one another in likeness to that love found in the Holy Trinity

Open to Discussion:
Catharin

S. #2085 "Man's vocation is to make God manifest by acting in conformity with his creation "in the image and likeness of God"